



## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### INFORMATION SERVICE

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#### SEATON ANNOUNCES AGREEMENT ON OIL AND GAS OPERATIONS IN LACASSINE REFUGE

Secretary of the Interior Fred A. Seaton today announced that the Department of the Interior and the Fish and Wildlife Service have been successful in obtaining from holders of Federal oil and gas leases issued in 1955 in the Lacassine National Wildlife Refuge agreement to imposition of maximum restrictions on oil and gas operations in the interest of preserving wildlife values within the Refuge.

Involved are six leases held by Frankfort Oil Company and Olin Gas Transmission Corporation and embracing a total of about 11,000 acres within the Refuge, which is located on the Louisiana Gulf Coast west of New Orleans.

The action announced today involved securing from the lessees, in conjunction with their exercise of legal right under the circumstances to an extension of their leases, agreement to imposition of conditions which will make all drilling operations on the Government lands hereafter subject to prior consent and approval of the Secretary with the concurrence of the Fish and Wildlife Service as to the time, place, and nature of such operations.

The leases issued in 1955 permitted drilling operations under certain stipulated conditions within the Lacassine Refuge. On January 8, 1958, Secretary Seaton acted to bar issuance of any new oil and gas leases within Federal wildlife refuges unless it could be established that existing activity on lands other than those proposed for leasing, was draining oil and gas from Federal lands.

The regulations issued in 1958 after extensive study by the Department and public hearings on the subject, in addition to forbidding leasing on nearly four and one-half million acres of wildlife refuge lands, imposed severe restrictions, in the interest of wildlife conservation, on three other classes of lands involving another 13 million acres administered for fish and wildlife purposes.

Secretary Seaton emphasized that the Department's action came only after:

(1) It was determined there was no legal basis under the circumstances for refusing to extend the Lacassine leases issued in 1955;

(2) The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, which administers the refuge, advised him that: It would be most difficult thus far to prove that the drilling at this point under our continuous supervision has to any degree reduced the utility of the refuge for the conservation of migratory waterfowl; that the Bureau would be hard-put to show any reduction in waterfowl use by the Company's activities, and that the Bureau could not successfully defend in court the cancellation of the Frankfort leases at this time on the basis of biological damage to the refuge, if such action is now being contemplated; and

(3) The holders of the leases and their assignees agreed to the expanded full control of future operations providing for direct Secretarial supervision, and total application of the additional requirements and restrictions made applicable by the 1958 regulations to wildlife lands generally but not theretofore specifically applicable to the holders of the Federal leases at Lacassine.

Director Dan Janzen of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife informed the Secretary that Frankfort has spent about \$5 million to date within the Refuge, including recent expenditure of approximately \$500,000 to put down a casing to a depth of 10,500 feet on a new well upon which they plan to resume operations in the drilling season in 1961, after the six-month shutdown required by their leases during the waterfowl wintering season. The Bureau pointed out that:

"Two other companies are drilling and producing gas at 15,000-foot levels on the refuge by virtue of having reserved the mineral rights when the land passed into Federal hands. All these operations are taking place under our supervision, and the companies are complying with our protective regulations."

"The action by the Department in this instance," Secretary Seaton said, "will assure a direct Secretarial role in the supervision by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife of these leases, and with the lessees' acceptance of imposition of the 1958 regulations the Department will be in a position to fully protect the wildlife values involved."

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